



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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CORMORANTS IN MIDWEST EAT QUANTITIES OF CARP, STUDIES SHOW

Cormorants--large fish-eating birds distantly related to pelicans--eat 95 per cent carp in some Midwestern lakes and streams, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports. Many biologists have stated during past years that cormorants principally eat rough fish and seldom prey on food or game fish. Recent observations by wild-life biologists in the upper Midwest completed a study that corroborates these earlier findings.

The studies of the cormorant's dietary habits were made at Bear River Refuge, Utah, Necedah Refuge, Wisconsin, Tishomingo Refuge, Oklahoma, Sand Lake Refuge, South Dakota, Squaw Creek Refuge, Missouri, and Chautauqua Refuge, Illinois.

Some fishermen in the Midwest have thought that cormorants were competing with them for game fish, but these studies indicate that the birds eat only very small quantities of bluegills and bass. It is the slow, surface wallowing carp that fall prey to the cormorant. In the Mississippi River basin a relatively similar situation occurs, where cormorants feed mainly on large quantities of gizzard shad.

Along the Atlantic coast, however, cormorants at times feast on commercial fish which they steal from pound nets, and are thus not welcomed by commercial fishermen. But the habits of the birds vary according to the area in which they congregate and the availability of fish occurring there. Except for those cormorants which rob the nets of commercial fish, the birds on the coast eat fish of little value to men: sculpin, gunnel, sand lance, capelin, etc.

Besides raiding pound nets in certain areas, other local depredations of cormorants are evident--as at some fish hatcheries. Where a proved need occurs, cormorant control is undertaken locally by state and Federal agencies.

Cormorants rarely eat trout or salmon, studies show, because they can't catch them or because the fish inhabit the deeper, colder water. In the New England states the cormorant often catches the slow moving suckers, and local sportsmen seeing the birds fishing often accuse them of taking trout.

Fishing clubs along streams flowing into the Gulf of St. Lawrence used to pay a bounty of 25 cents a head on cormorants, until Canadian ornithologists proved that not a single captured bird had eaten salmon.

Because the cormorant devours fish voraciously, it is often regarded as the emblem of gluttony. It is a dark-colored water bird with webbed feet, long neck, and slender hooked beak. In China, a species of cormorant is trained to catch fish for commercial fishermen.

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